

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 BUCHAREST 000133

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR EUR/NCE/BILL SILKWORTH, EB/DMALAC, OES/HLEE
USDA PASS FAS/OA/BSIMMONS
STATE PASS TO USAID/JLEWIS, SELLER, MWINTER
SOFIA FOR AGRICULTURAL ATTACHE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [SENV](#) [EAGR](#) [ETRD](#) [ECON](#) [SENV](#) [TBIO](#) [RO](#)

SUBJECT: BIOTECHNOLOGY OUTREACH PROJECT FOR ROMANIA

REF: STATE 244670

THIS CABLE IS SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PROTECT
ACCORDINGLY

1. SUMMARY: (SBU) Unique in the region, Romania which is expected to join the European Union (EU) in 2007, is a biotech pioneer, promoting and cultivating transgenic soybeans currently not approved for commercial planting in the EU. The Mission's objective is to help Romania enter the EU with its viable biotech industry firmly secured, as well as with an educated populace that understands the merits of biotechnology. By increasing efforts in Romania now, the US will have a strong European ally with common interests and shared beliefs to combat the EU's anti-GMO position in the years ahead. State Department funding for this initiative is now critical as Romania counts down to EU membership, while pressure from anti-GMO groups builds. With this in mind, Post is proposing a broad public education campaign, in order to disseminate scientifically sound information about modern biotechnology through workshops and forums. END SUMMARY.

BACKGROUND

2. (U) The Mission currently has a well-defined biotechnology program funded by USAID with technical assistance from FAS. The Embassy would like to complement its current program, which focuses only on high-level biotech policymakers, by conducting a broad public educational outreach campaign to reach the average consumer. Despite repeated attempts by a number of anti-biotech organizations to influence public opinion through sensational newspaper headlines, to date consumers' rejection of bioengineered food is limited. This presents an opportunity for the US Mission to create a comprehensive public outreach plan focused on the benefits of agricultural biotechnology, before opinions are formed. The proposed program builds on existing contacts, local expertise on USAID and FAS matching funds.

3. (U) The goal of the Embassy's public diplomacy initiative is to spur debate and discussion about biotechnology, create positive public opinion, and to provide broader availability of scientific information about agricultural biotechnology to both the media and everyday consumers. Part of the educational campaign will target key opinion leaders in the following fields: media, education, the environment, the food industry, among others. They will learn about the scientific, research and regulatory processes involved in agricultural biotechnology as well as the benefits for Romania. Gaining key opinion leaders' support will help increase the public's awareness and trust in foods derived from GMO products. The proposed program has been discussed with and received the backing of local counterparts who have created an informal consortium to steer the program's activities and content. This Consortium includes: the National Biosafety Commission, food research institutes, the local Association for Consumer Protection, environmental NGOs, and the Science and Education Department of the Romanian National Broadcasting Corporation (who offered air-time as an in-kind contribution).

PROJECT PLAN

4. (U) The proposed consumer-oriented public outreach campaign will be conducted within a nine-month timeframe and will conclude before end of FY05 via the following set of activities:

A. Biotech Seminars: Ten focus group discussions with media participation in five large urban areas of Romania, where the main agricultural universities are located - Bucharest, Timisoara, Iasi, Cluj and Craiova. To open and maintain dialogue among relevant groups, two sets of seminars will be held in each location. To effectively communicate positive messages on biotechnology to the public, we will use formal presentations by identified local opinion leaders. International speakers and scientists will also be utilized.

Venues will be provided by the Project. Participants will be recruited among university professors with relevant expertise, local industry representatives, and local media representatives, including television and radio commentators and newspaper reporters.

B. Educational Materials: To complement the workshops and media events, English language publications on the benefits of biotechnology will be made available for translation into Romanian, to reach mass audiences with local language materials.

C. Web Site: A stand-alone web page for the project will be designed for information dissemination, and to serve as a clearinghouse for various other GMO-related websites to ensure a broad outreach. The content of the webpage will be cleared by the Consortium and key opinion leaders. Funds will be made available for the web designer. After the project's termination, funding for maintaining and updating the webpage will be provided by relevant USAID-projects, FAS, or by interested local partners such as local industry or the Biotech Farmers Association. Materials that will be circulated at workshops will be posted on Project's webpage prior to organizing the event.

D. Surveys: The Steering Commission will contract a survey on consumers' attitudes on biotech food both immediately before and after the project to measure the effectiveness of the diplomacy initiatives and outreach campaign. The information obtained from the surveys will be useful for continued efforts funded by FAS and USAID, and will serve as a barometer on the effectiveness of influencing consumer attitudes on GMO issues in other countries.

E. Local Organization Outreach: Funding will be provided to host country organizations interested in promoting and disseminating positive information on agricultural biotechnology such as the Biotech Farmers Association. These organizations will develop, publish and disseminate, on behalf of their organization, materials that promote GMO products and teach about their usefulness and safety. Materials printed by local organizations may carry more credibility and have a greater impact on consumer opinions than materials produced and disseminated by US organizations.

5. (U) EXPECTED RESULTS: This project expects to influence the opinion of the average Romanian consumer towards biotechnology by focusing on price, health and other social benefits. This initiative will educate the media about biotechnology and expose professors, consumers and other participants to arguments explaining that biotech products are as safe as their conventional alternatives. By the end of the outreach campaign, the Mission expects that at least 40 press articles, as well as additional television and radio spots will be disseminated throughout Romanian society. It is expected that at least 70 percent of the country's population will be exposed to positive GMO messages as a result of this campaign. Additionally, local partners will sustain the biotechnology website, the Biotech Farmers' Association will have gained greater recognition and credibility, and we believe the Media will continue to print positive updates on GMO issues as opposed to negative anti-GMO propaganda.

REQUESTED FUNDING

6. (U) A part-time person will be hired to organize logistics and participation in ten events. Partial cost estimations for this activity are as follows:

- fee for subcontractor: \$1000/event * 10 = \$10,000;
- transportation, lodging, M&IE for organizers during planning/organizing stages: \$3,360
- rental rooms and conference packages : \$500/day * 5 * 2 = \$5,000;
- funding lodging M&IE for three local biotech speakers: \$200 * 20 days = \$4,000
- local transportation: \$800 * 3 persons = \$2,400.
- reproduction costs for materials to be distributed to participants: \$5 * 2 events * 5 locations * 40 participants = \$2,000
- communication costs: \$2,000
- support to local GMO promoters (bio-safety commission, Farmers' Association) to produce and disseminate pro-GMO publications: \$10,000
- translation and reproduction of materials into Romanian language: \$8,000.
- webpage design and maintenance: \$4,000
- consumer attitude survey: \$10,000
- miscellaneous and unexpected costs: \$1,000;
- Total budget: \$59,960

7. (U) U.S. Embassy Bucharest is contributing matching funds from USAID and FAS to cover following expenses:

- international airfare for three (3) International

Speakers/Scientists: \$1200 * 3 = \$3,600
- M&IE and lodging \$228 * 30 days = \$6,840
- funding local travel for three international biotech speakers: \$800 * 30 days = \$2,400
- honoraria for International Speakers/Scientists \$3,000 * 3 = \$9,000
- FAS and USAID employee contributions to coordinating workshops, developing materials, recruiting speakers, translation, and overall oversight of project: \$20,000
-Total Local Embassy Contribution: \$41,840

18. (U) Contributions from local Romanian Organizations include the above-mentioned members of the steering committee who will be responsible for the design of content of workshops, as well as the development and dissemination of published materials. A radio station with nation-wide penetration has agreed to broadcast a series of weekly two-minute spots focusing on the project's message and events.

19. (SBU) Embassy Control Officer will be Erin Kotheimer (Economic Officer, ext. 451). Please do not hesitate to contact her if you require additional information about this proposal. Post believes that we have reached a critical juncture as Romania approaches EU membership. A strong push for public education is now needed to build momentum as Romania seeks to position its biotechnology industry within the legal framework of the EU.

DELARE